

Kirk's town hall is so packed that a 2nd session was added (Chicago Tribune)

By Georgia Garvey

Aug 25, 2009 - An Arlington Heights town hall meeting on health-care reform led to impassioned debate Monday afternoon, with overflow crowds chanting, carrying signs and forcing a second meeting.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) added the second session after about 800 people -- on all sides of the debate -- showed up to voice their opinions.

Similar town hall meetings on health care have drawn large and vocal crowds across the

country in recent weeks. In Arlington Heights, those at Monday's meeting alternately cheered, booed and applauded -- but stayed mostly civil during the question-and-answer session. Those left outside during the first meeting chanted competing slogans, holding signs such as, "Tort reform, insurer choice" and "Health care for all."

Parts of Sigwalt Street at Arlington Heights Road were closed about 2:30 p.m. to "mitigate traffic flow" during the meetings, Police Capt. Nick Pecora. He said building access for everyone except those there for village business was denied starting about 2:15 p.m. -- 45 minutes before the meeting began.

Brian Dvoret of Wheeling, who attended the first session, said he is unemployed and spends \$1,000 a month to insure his family.

Dvoret supports a public option and would like to buy into a group health plan.

"The health insurance companies are ripping us off," he said. "I'm not for saying other taxpayers need to support my bill. I don't want that. I want the ability of equal competition."

Others such as Alan Minoff of Wilmette said they opposed the Obama administration's health-care reform proposal and wanted lawmakers to slow down and reassess the plan.

"There are other programs proposed by Republicans, which are very, very different ideas to reform health care," he said before the meeting. "It's not a rush."

The mostly middle-age and older crowd in the first session tended to be more in favor of a public option, while a more mixed age group in the second session backed ideas such as tort reform and increasing insurer choice.

Kirk said he wished more lawmakers would hold town hall gatherings, calling them the "voice of the American people."

He discussed his own proposals, which included allowing people to buy insurance from providers in any state and reforming medical malpractice laws.

"The United States is the most litigious society on planet Earth right now," he said.

Many in the audience said some kind of reform was necessary.

"Insurance companies have gotten rid of the sick people," said Barbara Amendola of Highwood. "We can't delay this. ... American workers need to be protected."

Amendola said a cancer scare convinced her there was something wrong with the system.

Abbe Sennett, a Deerfield resident and cancer patient, said she's satisfied with her private insurance.

"I pay a fortune for it," she said, and hoped increasing competition would bring her premiums down but strongly opposed public health insurance plans. "I think that the United States, we're

based on individualism and not for the group, like socialism is."

Police Capt. Pecora said despite the strong opinions, orderly behavior ruled the day.

"There was no lawlessness," he said.

Mike Reynolds, superintendent of maintenance for Arlington Heights, said capacity in the Village Hall rooms, which was reached for both meetings, was 400.